

Christian Apologetics

The Classical Arguments

Lecture II

September 24, 2015

I. Introduction to the Classical Arguments

A. Classical Apologetics

1. An approach to apologetics based upon attempted deductive demonstrations of God's existence and character.
2. Holders of this position include Plato, Aristotle, Philo, Clement Justin Martyr, early Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure, Thomas of Aquinas, Rene Descartes, Berkeley, Charles Hodge, B.B. Warfield, Arthur Lindsley, and William Lane Craig.

B. Faith and Reason

1. As Christians we have a high view of reason and should be rational logical in our thinking, but we should not embrace *rationalism*.
 - a. Rationalism arrogantly purports to be able to explain everything on the basis of human reasoning with an overt rejection of anything supernatural or even immaterial. No miracles. No virgin birth. No resurrection. Ultimately, no God is necessary to them.
 - b. So in the Age of Enlightenment (approx. 1620-1780) many critiques of Christianity occurred. It was characterized by:
 - Omni-competence of humans to understand all things.
 - All beliefs must be rational
 - Reason alone
 - Reason over revelation
 - c. It's effect on Christianity
 - No miracles
 - No supernatural revelation – the Bible was of human origin only.
 - Man is highest authority
 - The person of Christ was rendered only human. A denial of the two natures of Christ.
 - Increasing attacks on Scripture to this day.
2. Christians must by default, place revelation (the Bible) over reason, without abandoning reason.
3. Responses:
 - a. Pietism.
 - b. Fideism
 - c. Existentialism

II. The Cosmological Argument

- A. A deductive argument with an *a posteriori* first premise (*a posteriori* means “from experience or dependent upon empirical evidence”)

B. Definition: An argument for the existence of a **first cause** that begins with the existence of the universe (cosmos) or part of it and argues back to a first and original cause; it is based on the principle of causality—every effect must have a cause.

C. Also called the Argument from Contingency

D. Causality

1. Current Causality—This argument uses the first definition given above. It is based on the fact that a presently contingent universe requires a current cause. Contingent: that which does not need to be and therefore depends upon something else for its existence.
2. Original Causality—This argument uses the second definition given above. It is based on a chain of causality through or in time; a chain of causes eventually ends with an original or first cause. Example: the classic form and the Kalam Cosmological Argument

E. The Classic Form

1. Some contingent (dependent) beings exist.
2. All dependent beings must have a cause or explanation for their dependent existence (Principle of Sufficient Reason or PSR).
3. An infinite regress of existentially dependent causes is impossible because the whole sequence still needs a cause/explanation.
4. Therefore, there must be a first, uncaused Cause of the dependent.
5. This Uncaused Cause is the God of the Bible.

F. J.J.C. Smart summarizes: Everything in the world around us is *contingent*...For a really satisfying explanation of why anything contingent exists you must eventually begin with something which is not itself contingent, that is, with something of which we cannot say that it might not have existed, that is we must begin with a necessary being...*If anything exists an absolutely necessary being must exist. Something exists. Therefore an absolutely necessary being must exist.*

G. Objections:

1. First Objection: If the PSR is true, then the universe exists necessarily, and the argument fails.

H. Some Observations from Nathan Sasser:

1. David Hume points out that there is no way of proving that the Principle for Sufficient Reason is true. For all we know, the world is full of brute facts—contingent facts which simply have no sufficient reason, either within themselves or outside of themselves.
2. Hume points out that we can always conceive of one contingent event occurring without any other contingent fact occurring. If conceivability=possibility, then there are no necessary connections between contingent facts and hence no way of inferring one contingent fact from another.
3. So non-Christians have no grounds for believing that there is any sufficient reason for the contingent facts in their world.
4. But the possibility that the world consists of brute facts undermines science: science is the search for sufficient reasons for the contingent facts.

5. There is no way to make inferences or predictions about a world of brute facts. So, the non-Christian is stuck in Hume's skeptical dilemma, and Christians should point this out.
6. However, Christians should also refuse to accept the PSR without qualification. The fact is that PSR applies differently to the creature and to the creator. The Sufficient Reason for the occurrence of every contingent fact is God's decree. However, there is no further "sufficient reason" for God's decree itself: the will of God is its own ultimate explanation and the grounds of all other possible explanation.
7. God's will is "contingent" in the sense that he could have decreed to create a world different than this one, and he could have decreed to create no world at all. But his will has no further explanation, so the PSR does not apply to it.
8. If we attempt to apply the PSR without presupposing the Creator-creature distinction, then we end up making the whole world a necessary being.
9. The universe and the event and objects it contains really are contingent because they are not *absolutely necessary*. Relative to the First Cause, second causes are neither absolutely necessary, nor sufficient to bring about effects.
10. But causal connections within the universe are real because of their *hypothetical necessity*: God has chosen to use means to bring about predestined effects.
11. We can only know what kinds of causal connections God has *actually* ordained within the world by knowing God's decree, his plan for the universe.
12. We can only know of God's nature and his plan for history if he chooses to tell it to us, through *revelation*.
13. Christians *do* know something of God's plan for history, through *revelation*.
14. So the Christian worldview makes it possible to infer one contingent fact from another: we know something of God's plan for history and what the interconnections he has decreed will obtain in the world. The non-Christian worldview either eliminates contingent facts altogether or makes contingent facts into brute facts, which destroy the possibility of knowledge.

III. The Teleological Argument

- A. Definition: The universe exhibits design and nescience (that which exhibits intelligence in its design but has no intelligence itself) and therefore requires an intelligent creator. This argument in general says:
 1. The universe exhibits design.
 2. All design requires a designer.
 3. Therefore, a designer of the universe must exist.
- B. Types of Teleological Arguments:
 1. Argument Based on Probability—argues on the basis of the probability that the universe, or a part of it, could come into existence as it is, designed, based on chance.
 This argument might be formulated:
 - a. The universe has human life forms in it.
 - b. The probability that human life could develop on its own is $1/10^{40}$.

- c. Therefore it is highly probable that the universe is designed.
2. Argument Based on Analogy—argues on the basis of man-made objects and analogizes that if these need a designer, then so would something much more complex like the universe.
 - a. The universe exhibits design.
 - b. Designed man-made objects require a designer.
 - c. Therefore, by analogy, the universe, being much more complex, must need a designer.
 3. A Best Explanation Design Argument
 - a. We observe order (and regularity and beauty) in the material universe.
 - b. There are only two possible explanations for this order. It is either the product of impersonal material causes or of intelligent design, i.e. a Mind.
 - If order in the material world is caused by disordered material causes, then order arises from chaos. But this seems wrong.
 - If order in the material world is caused by other ordered material causes, then we have an infinite regress of orderly material causes. But this too seems wrong.
 - c. Therefore the order of the material universe cannot be explained by other material causes.
 - d. Therefore the order in the universe must be the product of intelligent design, i.e. a Mind.

C. Types of Evidence of Design¹

1. Design as Complexity: The more complex something is, the more designing it requires (i.e. – compare a typewriter to a computer).

Example: Paley's Watchmaker

2. Design as Information: Information systems require intelligent design (i.e. books, newspapers, telephones, televisions, computers).

Example: Information Theory

- a. One of the greatest discoveries of the 20th century was the design of DNA as the basic “communicator” of life. A DNA molecule is formed by placing a sequence of only four possible bases together in a particular order, over and over. These bases act like “letters” of a genetic alphabet, combining in various sequences to form words (codons), sentences (genes), and paragraphs (chromosomes). These base sequences are all the instructions needed to guide the functioning of a cell and, therefore, all of life. This has given rise to a concept called the sequence hypothesis: an exact order of symbols records information. The genetic code then is a language communicating information to each living cell.
- b. The information theory provides a mathematical means for measuring information. This mathematical theory is based on the minimum number of instructions needed to achieve the complexity of the specific item being measured (it measures specificity and complexity). The probability of randomly typing “The dog is brown” is 1 in 79,766,433,076,870,000,000,000.

¹ Some of the scientific information used here comes from Philosophy and Contemporary Ideas: An Introduction to Philosophy by Mark W. Foreman (used by permission of Harcourt Brace Custom Publishers, Orlando, FL).

- c. Applying information theory to DNA, we discover two things. 1) DNA is an incredibly complex language, fitting any description of specified complexity and, therefore, is evidence of intelligence in its origin. 2) The odds of DNA occurring purely on the basis of chance is purely nonsensical. The universe is simply too small and too young for it to have occurred.

3. Design as Order

Example: Swinburne's Temporal Order of the Universe Argument

- a. As we observe the universe, we discover an overwhelmingly striking fact about it: its temporal order. Regularities of succession are all pervasive (gravity, velocity, etc.). The universe is governed by a set of very simple laws which we are capable of understanding and which we can use to successfully predict the future with amazing accuracy. This orderliness is amazing in that the universe could have naturally been quite chaotic. Yet it isn't.
 - b. The phenomena of this order cannot be explained by science. It is not that we don't have enough information and someday we may. It has to do with the nature of scientific explanation. All scientific explanation is done according to scientific laws. However, we are here questioning the actual laws themselves: why does the universe operate according to these laws when it does not have to? The universe is actually made up of a small amount of fundamental particles that operate according to just a few simple laws, and this seems to be pervasive throughout the entire universe. This is where scientific explanation simply stops. So we are left simply saying that the universe is orderly purely by coincidence **or there is a personal agent involved in bringing about this orderliness.**
4. Design as Purpose: Things that seem to fulfill a particular purpose exhibit design (i.e. watches, washing machines, automobiles).

Example: The Anthropic Principle and Cosmic Constants

- a. A cosmic constant or singularity is a fact about a fundamental element of physical reality, which has no scientific reason behind its existence or properties; it is just a brute fact. Examples are the speed of light and the numerical equivalence of Pi. The numerical values of these cosmic constants have no apparent scientific reason why they are the particular value they are. They could have been different from what they are. Also, these cosmic constants exist independent of each other.
- b. The existence of these cosmic constants has led a number of scientists to formulate the anthropic principle: The Universe seems to have unfolded with a purpose—to assure the existence of life. In other words, while there appears to be no scientific reason for these constants, many of them are absolutely necessary for the maintenance of life in the universe. There are two reasons why scientists have reached this conclusion:
 - The tiniest fluctuation in any one of these constants would make the condition in the universe impossible for any kind of life.
 - The rate of expansion of the big bang: a decrease of its rate by one millionth of a millionth and temperatures throughout the universe would never fall below 10,000 degrees; an increase of the same amount and galaxies, stars, and planets would never have occurred.
 - The matter in the universe is evenly distributed to an accuracy of <0.1%. The slightest variation would rule out life.

- If the constants of major forces like the gravitational force and electromagnetic force had been slightly greater or smaller, life could not exist.
 - The ratio of carbon to oxygen in the world: any tiny alteration and life would not be.
 - The mass of a proton: if it were increased by just 0.2% hydrogen would be unstable and life could not exist.
 - The temperature range of the universe - life can only exist in 1-2% of the entire possible range of temperatures. The position, size, rotation, and atmosphere of the earth (all constants that are independent of each other) places the earth in exactly the temperature range possible for life.
 - The exact chemical balance, radioactive balance, and water forming compounds of hydrogen and oxygen (which independently are formed with exact relationship of protons and electrons to make water) just happen to exist on the same planet with the temperature range in order for life to occur.
- The possibility of all these constants occurring independently by coincidence is staggering. Example: Imagine all the independent things that must coalesce together to send a man to the moon and safely return. No one would say that this could happen purely by coincidence, yet the independent factors that have come together to guarantee life in the universe are hundreds of times more complex.
- c. Therefore, the universe seems to have a purpose, and “purpose” implies intelligence behind the universe. There are a manifold number of these cosmic constants. We have considered only a small number of them.

D. Criticisms of the Teleological Argument

1. The Problem of Analogy: David Hume provided the most famous criticism against the design argument. He criticized the way it uses arguments based on analogy. He had two basic points:
 - a. Analogies can only be applied to objects that one can empirically experience. In other words if we want to reach a conclusion by an analogy about two objects, “A” and “B”, we have to be able to actually see “A” and “B”.
 - b. One must have at least two or more experiences of a thing in order to make an analogy concerning it. Again using “A” and “B” not only do I have to be able to see them, but I have to see them more than once to make any analogous conclusions about them.

Hume’s point is that since the creation of the universe is something nobody empirically experienced (nobody actually saw it) and since the universe is a unique event (there is only one universe), we cannot use analogy concerning it; i.e., we have experience with watches and other man-made objects to know how man-made objects come together, but we have no experience with the origin of the universe.

Reply: Both of these arguments are based on assumptions that are simply false.

- Scientists are constantly inferring the existence of unseen entities, such as electrons, black holes, or the magnetic field, by analogy with what they can know and see. In fact most scientific hypothesis is done on the basis of analogy. The very nature of analogy is inferring the unknown from that which is known.
- Just because the universe is unique, doesn’t mean you can’t know anything about it from analogy. The fact that an object is unique does not rule out the possibility that it

has properties in common with other objects (such as being designed). If Hume was right, we could never know anything by analogy.

2. Hume's other criticism of the Design Argument (from *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*)
 - a. His basic point: The design argument assumes that order in the universe needs an explanation, while the order in the mind of the Designer is self-explanatory. But why should we think that that assumption is true?
 - b. Maybe matter just inherently orders itself. After all, if the thoughts in the Designer's Mind can be self-ordering, why can't matter be self-ordering?
 - c. On the flip side, if we need a further explanation for the order we observe in matter then why don't we need a further explanation for the order in the Designer's Mind?
 - d. And if the order in a Designer's Mind needs a further explanation too, then this would lead us to an infinite regress of explanations. We might as well not look for any further explanation of the order we observe in the universe itself.
 - e. We have no basis for assuming that our orderly world is inherently unlikely or improbable and therefore in need of an explanation. After all, we have no other worlds to compare ours with.
 - f. So Hume claims there is no explanation or sufficient reason for the order displayed in the universe—order is a **brute fact**.
 - g. Atheist J.L. Mackie suggests: "What's wrong he asks, "with the supposition that there simply is temporal order, as an ultimate, not further explainable, brute fact?" (oops! There goes science, all human knowledge.)

Reply:

- Christianity says that all contingent facts (including existence and orderliness of the universe) are explained by the being and the free, sovereign decree of God—no brute facts.
- Conceivability is not an adequate guide to possibility, which is why we need revelation. The incomprehensibility and sovereignty of God, and his free self-disclosure in revelation, are the necessary presuppositions of knowing anything.

3. The Problem of Evolution: Many philosophers and scientists feel that Darwin's Theory of Evolution sounded the death knell to the Design argument. They argue that, rather than a grand Designer, the appearance of design is the product of natural selection (random chance and mutation) among living objects. In short, evolution answers all the design questions: it's simply the survival of the fittest.

Reply:

- Evolution doesn't answer any of the questions dealing with design in non-living objects.
- Nature reveals an anticipatory order (it plans for its own survival). The need for oxygen, food, etc., is supplied by nature. The very appearance and survival of species is impossible without this preparatory adaptation of the environment. Evolution alone cannot account for this anticipatory aspect of nature. If everything were truly random, then one would be expected to see survival of the fittest only 50% of the time. But

nature gives it much better odds, almost 100%. In fact, the very capacity to change and adapt in order to survive demonstrates complex design. Where does this survival principle come from? Physical laws alone cannot account for it.

- Even if evolution were true, it still operates according to known and established laws of biochemistry and physics. The orderliness of these laws and the fact that the universe follows them in regular succession, and will continue to do so, cannot be accounted for merely on the basis of random physical reactions. They need to be accounted for some other way.
4. The Appearance Argument: The universe is not designed, it is just our minds way of organizing reality in a way we can understand it. All apparent design is just a product of our mind and not really out there at all. Naturally it appears designed to us, for our mind is here to organize it to appear so.

Reply:

While it is true that our mind does tend to organize chaos so that we can understand it, the nature and extent of order in the universe does not seem to fall into this category. We do not seem to be creating order, rather we seem to be discovering it. It seems to be in places where we have never expected to see it.

IV. Assignments

Read Bahnsen chapters 13-18 by Oct. 15. Listen to his debate with Stein by Nov. 12 ([Greg Bahnsen verses Gordon Stein Debate](#), Full Version – You Tube

A colleague tells you that he watched Carl Sagan's Cosmos on PBS in 1980 and he doesn't believe in God anymore. What are your top ten reasons you would give him as to why he should reconsider Christianity?